

ACCOUNT

OF A

CASE OF DIABETES MELLITUS,

ILLUSTRATING THE IMPORTANCE OF ABSTINENCE FROM
BREAD IN THAT DISEASE.TO THE EDITORS OF THE PROVINCIAL MEDICAL
JOURNAL.

GENTLEMEN,—Having been much interested with a recent communication in this Journal from the pen of Dr. Cowan, exhibiting an instructive example of the injurious influence of bread in diabetes, and being strongly impressed with the great importance of the subject, I beg to offer additional confirmation of the truth from the notes of a case which occurred in my practice a few years since.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant,

THEOPHILUS THOMPSON, M.D.,

Physician to the Northern Dispensary.

Keppel-street, July 25, 1843.

On the 5th of November, 1840, I was consulted by Mr. —, a gentleman of naturally sanguine temperament and intelligent character, but in whom disease of some years' duration had produced a haggard aspect, and depressed spirits; skin never perspiring, and, indeed, so dry as to be peeling off the wrists. He drank about ten pints of fluid daily, and passed nine pints of urine, smelling like hay, and sweet to the taste. Epigastrium full and tender; lining membrane of the cheeks and tongue vividly red, but extensively covered with an albuminous pellicle. He had been for ten weeks affected with obstinate constipation, for the relief of which strong purgatives had been administered. For some years previously he had suffered from irritable bladder, preventing his being able to remain long in public, and even in childhood annoying him in sleep. The gastric affection being the most urgent, eight leeches, and afterwards a blister, were applied to the epigastrium. The patient was recommended to adopt a milk and farinaceous diet, and to relieve the bowels with warm water enemata.

Nov. 8. The tenderness and fulness of epigastrium were removed; alvine evacuations natural; the morbid appearance of the mouth, and a similar condition of the extremity of the urinary mucous membrane, continued; eight pints of urine passed daily, of specific gravity 1.040. The patient was instructed to use the warm bath every evening, to have meat for dinner, drink freely of milk with lime water, and take one-sixth of a grain of acetate of morphia, with spirit of mindererus in camphor julep, every six hours.

11. Aspect less haggard; pulse natural; mucous membrane of the mouth and glans nearly natural, but the tongue rather dry; two days since passed an ascaris lumbricoides ten inches long; drinks daily seven pints; urine, seven pints and a half, of more urinous smell than formerly, but, on evaporation, depositing much saccharine extract; specific gravity, 1.038. To continue the medicine and the warm bathing.

12. Quantity of drink in twenty-four hours, eight pints and three-quarters; of urine, six pints and a quarter. On the 13th, quantity of each, seven pints

and a half. The daily allowance of milk reduced from five to two pints.

14. Gaining flesh; the skin more disposed to perspire; specific gravity of urine, 1.040. To use as common drink water acidulated with nitric acid.

20. Has gradually reduced his allowance of milk to two ounces; drinks about four pints of fluid daily, a quantity rather exceeding that of the urine, of which the specific gravity is 1.035; thirst much abated; alvine evacuations scybalous and pale. To take mercurial pill, with extract of henbane and James's powder, at bed-time, and a dose of castor oil in the morning; to substitute the hot air for the warm water bath, continue the acetate of morphia, and diminish the quantity of acid drink.

The hot air bath invariably occasioned profuse perspiration, and its daily use was productive of improvement, as manifested by the following statement of the respective quantities of drink and urinary secretion:—

	Drink.	Urine.
Nov. 20 to 21	. . . 4½ pints.	. . . 5 pints.
21 — 22	. . . 4½ „	. . . 4½ „
23 — 24	. . . 2½ „	. . . 3 „
24 — 25	. . . 2½ „	. . . 3 „

The urine, however, was found of the high specific gravity of 1.045, and it was, therefore, determined to enforce animal diet, to prohibit the use of bread and biscuit, in which he had hitherto indulged, and of all vegetables, excepting those belonging to the cruciferous order. He now partook freely of spinach and water-cresses, but carefully abstained from all vegetables abounding in starch. Under this plan the quantity of urine was in a few days reduced to two pints, and its specific gravity to 1.027.

On the 1st of December, being tempted to take some toasted bread, the quantity rose to five pints, and the specific gravity to 1.041. During the subsequent week he again abjured bread, and the average quantity fell to two pints, of specific gravity 1.020, excepting that on one occasion, after taking an apple, the quantity rose to five pints, and the specific gravity to 1.030. Again, for about ten days he exercised self-control, and the average became two pints, of specific gravity 1.020. He recovered a greater amount of flesh and strength than he had possessed for two years, could walk five miles without fatigue, and felt perfectly well. This improvement, however, led him to presumptuous indulgence, but the most trivial departure from rule—even the bread in the stuffing of a hare, or a little toast for breakfast—uniformly occasioning a renewal of untoward symptoms. Gluten bread was tried for a time, but with very slight advantage. He seemed unable longer to tolerate the restriction, and, with the exception of partial amelioration under the use of the water of the Clifton hot wells, his health deteriorated, during the following year, in exact proportion to the failure of his resolution. The quantity of opium which he was accustomed to take was increased; ammonia, magnesia, as well as steel and other remedies, which it would be tedious to record, were administered in vain. Weary of my reiterated solicitations, that, profiting by the lessons of experience, he would discontinue the use of bread, he consulted an eminent but less rigid adviser, but his strength and flesh gradually failed, and in the summer of 1842 he died.

REMARKS.

In the example now recorded, as is frequent in such instances, there was associated a considerable degree of gastric disturbance, which required primary attention. The milk diet proved peculiarly suitable, and although the specific gravity of the urine continued the same under its use, in all other respects he improved. There was, however, no decided reduction in the specific gravity of the urine, or change in the essential character of the disease, until the patient totally abstained from bread, under which plan in December, 1840, every symptom of disease had disappeared. The specific gravity of the urine rose after eating an apple, but again subsided under prudent restrictions. Subsequently, however, his firmness yielded, and after various fluctuations corresponding with the degrees of his indulgence, he ultimately fell a victim to the disease.

I believe that in cases of true diabetes mellitus, if the use of bread is allowed the final issue will generally correspond. Exceptions to this rule are indeed on record. For example, a case occurred some time since at Guy's Hospital, which appeared to recover under the use of nauseating doses of ipecacuanha wine.

Mr. Heineken (London Med. Repos., Feb., 1823) has related an instance which yielded in three months to the use of 600 grains of opium; and the sulphur bath appears to have been singularly efficacious in the treatment of the patient Gosling, whose case is described by Dr. L. Bardsley (Hospital Facts and Observations), the quantity of urine being in fifteen weeks reduced from twenty-six to two pints, and the specific gravity from 1.038 to 1.010. Lately the iodide of iron, in doses of five grains thrice a-day, is said to have proved efficacious, yet it must be acknowledged as a general rule, deducible from the recorded instances of the disease, that durable improvement occurs only under the discontinuance of bread and of all vegetables abounding in starch. Our great aim in treatment should be to restore the function of the skin, the relation of which to the kidneys is of obvious importance, and to withhold all articles of diet easily convertible into sugar. The employment of other measures may be regulated by collateral circumstances, but improvement in the essential symptoms will almost uniformly be promoted or retarded, according to the degree of indulgence or restriction in the use of bread.

When we consider the remarkable power of habit in enabling man to adapt himself to every variety of regimen, and recal such instances as that of the miners of Chili fulfilling their unparalleled labors on a diet of beans and bread; or of some North American tribes living solely on fish; or, more especially, the Guachos of the Pampas, passing their life on horseback, subsisting for many months exclusively on beef, we are surprised that, under a disease such as we have described, the conviction of its necessity should be inadequate to enforce resolution; and the inquiry is naturally suggested whether a complete change of the whole plan of life might assist us in conquering the difficulty, and whether an active, open air life, resembling that of the Guachos, might contribute to render a fat meat diet, like that of those dexterous horsemen, an agreeable support of life.

CASE OF WATER CANKER,
WITH REMARKS.

TO THE EDITORS OF THE PROVINCIAL MEDICAL JOURNAL.

GENTLEMEN,—I shall feel much obliged by your inserting the following case in the Provincial Medical Journal.

I am, Gentlemen,
Your obedient servant,
W. TOMKINS, M.D.

Yeovil, July 18, 1843.

I beg, through the medium of the Provincial Medical Journal, to call the attention of my professional brethren to an important disease, which, however, I believe is but little known in this country, as far as I have been able to ascertain from extensive inquiry, both amongst my professional friends and the various authors to which I have referred. I remember many years since to have read an account of the affection I am about to describe, either in a work on military surgery or in some periodical; but as it was long before my attention had been practically drawn to the disease, I omitted to make any note of the circumstance, and have, consequently, been unable to refer to it. The only corroborative testimony I can give, to confirm the nature of the affection I am about to relate, is a statement made to me by an army surgeon, now deceased, who accompanied the unfortunate Walcheren expedition, and who, during my attendance on him, on account of diseased liver and enormous enlargement of the spleen—the sequelæ of intermittent fever contracted during that disastrous enterprise, said that he had seen numerous instances of “water canker,” a disease well known in Holland, and described it as being the result of exposure to marsh miasmata, and attended with great prostration.

I have seen three cases; but, as all of them presented similar symptoms and appearances, shall describe one only, which was the most severe, and occurred in the same individual three succeeding years during the month of January, and on each occasion appeared to have been induced by one and the same cause.

CASE.—I was desired to visit Mr. James Osborne, of Ilchester, Somerset, whose father was a respectable farmer, and found my patient had been exposed for several hours to the damp of the meadows bordering on the river for many successive nights, attending his flock in the lambing season. On visiting him, I at once said he was salivated, but he most solemnly assured me he had neither taken or applied externally medicine of any kind; the fætor of the breath, however so exactly resembled that produced by mercury, that I thought I could not have been deceived. I now examined the mouth attentively, and found the tongue swollen, and deeply indented from its pressure against the teeth; the gums and the whole of the mucous membrane of the mouth covered with a white incrustation, similar to what we observe in apthæ, except that it was much thicker. I used a syringe, and, having cleansed this away, found the mucous membrane highly inflamed, with the glands and follicles extremely vascular; in a few minutes, however, the mouth was filled with an acrid, watery fluid; the lips were very much swollen; the countenance anxious; the pulse slow, soft, and full; the bowels constipated; and the patient complained of great sinking at the